

title: Palm Sunday

Matt 21:1

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy week. Palm Sunday is a special holy day. On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, people laying palm branches in his path as they would royalty, shouting "Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!", openly acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. The story of Palm Sunday is very important because in many ways it sets the stage for Easter.

Our gospel lesson from Matt 21 starts off with Jesus preparing to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. For miles around the people of Israel had heard of his miracles and his wisdom. They had heard rumors that he was the messiah, prophesied in Scripture, come to save Israel. So, when they heard he was coming to Jerusalem, they flocked to see him. As he entered Jerusalem, the crowds adored him with cheers of "Hosanna." "Hosanna" means "Save us Now." They were proper in shouting this because here was the coming Messiah, the savior of Israel. Yet, the Palm Sunday story has a particular twist. The twist is this. No more than five days later, the same crowd who are cheering Jesus on would 5 days later be gathered around him, yelling "crucify him, crucify him." The same man who was greeted and cheered as a king would be executed on a cross, like a common criminal, because of them. What happened?!!!! How could something like that happen? What a terrible thing to happen. Yet I would forward to you the idea, that within us, here today, are the seeds of the same sinfulness which caused the crowd to turn against Jesus. Let me explain.

One of the problems was that the crowd watching Jesus had certain expectations of the Messiah. Their cheers give a hint of what they expected to see in the coming Messiah. "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David*" "*Hosanna*" We know these words are appropriate, but to the average Jew the Messiah was supposed to come and bring political and military action. The coming of the messiah was a time of rescue for Israel from its oppressors. It was a time for punishment for all those who had persecuted Israel. It was thought that once freed from the bondage of its political enemies, Israel would then be free to live as a nation under God. For this reason, they cheered him with words of "Hosanna" "Hosanna in the

highest.”

As we all know, this was not Jesus’ plan. In fact, as the crowd watched him, they realized that Jesus was not going to bring about the overthrow of Israel’s enemies. But rather, He was challenging the people of Israel instead. He questioned the religious authorities. He was calling himself God, and that really ticked them off. This was blasphemy. And the proper punishment for blasphemy, according to scripture, was death. And this was the reason why the crowd later called for Jesus’ crucifixion. He deserved the death as a blasphemer. It was for this reason the crowd turned against Jesus and demanded his death.

So, “what happened?” Well, this is the cause of the turn-around. The people in the crowd at the time were mistaken about the type of salvation that they needed. The crowd was mistaken about who Jesus was, who the Messiah was, and “the kind of salvation he was bringing. Salvation was not to be political or military in nature, but rather it was to be through the forgiveness of sins. Political and military freedom was not needed but rather a relationship with God. For without a relationship with God they were as good as dead. And it was forgiveness that was needed in order to re-enter into a relationship with God. The Holy one of Israel was eventually to be “the deliverer from their enemies,” but not from the earthly ones, but rather from the spiritual, from the oppression and slavery of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

Why did this happen? The problem was that Israel had certain expectations about God, about the Messiah, expectations which were not based in God’s will. And when those expectations were not met they took it out on God. Essentially, it was because he didn’t meet their expectations of “what they thought the Christ should be doing,” that they demanded that he be crucified. It is here also, in pointing an accusing finger at Israel, I now point the same finger at myself. Have I had expectations of God, expectations which were different from God’s? Have I had expectations which are different from God’s and when those expectations were not met, I became hurt. I became angry. When God does not meet our expectations, we too in some ways, “have turned against God”. Each of us share the same sinful nature with the crowd on Palm Sunday. Each of us is capable of putting expectations on God which are not in accordance to his will... Each one of us has experienced the disappointment of God not meeting our expectations. This happens when I focus only on what I want God to do for

me. If we focus only on what we want God to do, we will miss what God IS doing. For God IS doing something. When we look up to God and pray, please fix this. God, who loves us dearly says “yes I will fix it”. But when God looks down on us he sees things from a higher plane. Our expectations our prayers are limited, limited by our sinful nature, by our own selfish ways. We look only to solutions for our immediate problems. But when God goes to fix things he fixes it at the root.

With regard to salvation, God saw the root of our suffering was due to our sinful nature. God has a plan. Because Jesus died on the cross, our sins were forgiven. Because our sins were forgiven, we will not always be subject to the suffering of sin. For this reason, we have been saved.

But the story doesn't end there. The Holy week story continues to Good Friday. The same crowd who cried “Hosanna” now cries to Pilate “Let his blood be on us and our children.” It is a sinful cry. It was a cry saying we will take responsibility for crucifying Jesus, right or wrong. It was a sinful cry. This sinful outburst would relieve Governor Pilate of guilt so that he could allow the crowd to crucify Jesus. It was a sinful cry. It was a cry of a people blind to God's ways.

Interestingly enough, as Christians we too cry out, “Let his blood be upon us and our children.” We say the same things but for totally different reasons. Because we see things from God's perspective, our cry has a totally different meaning. Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death. Our sins and our sinful nature make us worthy of death and damnation. But God had a greater plan. Christ's blood, shed at the cross, covers over our sins. Because Jesus shed his blood on the cross, our relationship with God was healed. For this reason as Christians we cry out “Let his blood be upon us and our children.” But our cry has a totally different meaning. While we share the same sinful nature with the crowd, while we share the same cry of the crowd. “Hosanna” “Let his blood be upon us.” as those who have put faith in Christ, as those truly saved by Christ, we are total opposites. We were saved by the shed blood of Jesus. We are saved by the blood of Jesus on us. Amen

This is the purpose of our celebration of Palm Sunday.

Today we cry

“Hosanna” - save us

”Let his blood be upon us.”

The cries, not of a vengeful crowd,
but by the blood of Christ,
the cheers of a grateful crowd.
Amen

Just as a heads up, as we enter into holy week,
as we enter into Maundy Thursday and Good Friday,
we will also find that the cries of the vengeful crowd
have a total different meaning
to those saved by Christ.

May you have a blessed Holy week.